

The Reinvention Report - January 1. 1999

Wisconsin, Bavaria Sign First International Innovations Pact

The Wisconsin state environmental agency last month signed one of the first international environmental agreements, with government officials from Bavaria, Germany, to test and promote innovative approaches to ecological protection and economic progress.

Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson (R) and Bavarian Environment Minister Dr. Werner Schnappauf of the Bavarian State Ministry for Regional Development and Environmental Affairs signed the agreement Dec. 1.

A key goal of the agreement is that it will allow environmental management (EMSs) of some businesses in Bavaria and Wisconsin to be verified to both European and international standard, according to a Dec 15 press release.

The 10-point Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) - which will engage business, government and citizen interest groups committed to innovation - will emphasize the testing of emerging tools, such as EMSs. These system will meet legal standards while achieving "greater, verified environmental results better than the present [command and control] system," says a Wisconsin government official.

"The world wants better ways to protect the environment at a time when government resources are increasingly limited but trade's potential is not," Thompson said in a Dec. 15 statement to the press.

The MOU, the Wisconsin-Bavarian Regulatory Reform Working Partnership, is designed around ten agreements between the two states. Some specific tasks agreed to include:

- establishing of joint projects to promote businesses' participation EMSs under the international ISO 14000 standard, and under a similar European Community approach known as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS),
- striving for integrated environmental occupational health and risk-based management systems, which ensure an efficient and lean organization with greater results;
- providing strong support for cooperation with small- and medium-sized enterprises for their environmental performance and compliance results; and,
- embarking on an international environmental law project in cooperation with the International Environmental Lawyers' Network and other partners.

A source with the states Department of Natural Resources (DNR) says that this agreement was formed out of a "natural fit between the two states which have many social, cultural and industrial ties. This source says that Bavaria and Wisconsin are both recognized for government innovation and share a common heritage and compatible heritage.

One of the key elements of the agreement, this DNR source says, is the emphasis on trans-Atlantic trade. Under the requirement to have EMSs, businesses in both countries will be verified to European EMAS standards, and to the international ISO 14000 standard.

According to a DNR source, the dual certification process allows the EMAS approach to "compensate for EMS' shortcomings." The source says that the European EMAS approach does an "excellent" job of predicting performance down the road through a company's requirement to publicly report its performance - which the EMS approach does not require. This also indicates to regulators which facilities they have to pay more attention to, while those who institute these systems will move to the "head of the line for regulatory relief," this source says.